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Kingdom, not Kingly Rule:

Assessing the Kingdom of God as Sacred Space

Abstract: Arguing that Gustaf Dalman's definition of *basileia* as 'kingly rule' has severely limited possibilities for appreciation of the Kingdom as a space in biblical scholarship, this article interacts with key insights into the human relationship with sacred space in order to gain a deeper understanding of the significance of the Kingdom of God. Rather than closing down meaning by limiting space to that which is physical and concrete, the discussion seeks to open up the meaning of the Kingdom as a community space, connected to the divine, and spoken of as having a boundary and a specific point of entry; a space with both universal and particular aspects; and a space which draws on the expectation of a new world. All of these aspects of the Kingdom set out the contours of a relationship between God-people-space that is performative and constantly in motion.

Keywords: Kingdom of God; Gustaf Dalman; Gospels; sacred space; boundary; particular and universal; new world; 'spatial turn'

Introduction

The Kingdom of God has been discussed and debated extensively in biblical scholarship, though never for its value as a sacred space. When viewed in this light, it has the potential to contribute to our broader understanding of religion and specifically the ways that spatial resources form part of religious experience. Gustaf Dalman, a biblical scholar of an earlier

generation presents a particular problem for this type of investigation, in that his highly influential 'kingly rule' definition of *basileia* excludes more spatial readings of 'kingdom'. A critique of Dalman allows us to move away from the dominance of the 'reign of God' definition and to consider the possible insights to be gained by considering the Kingdom as a significant space, rather than as an idea, concept or metaphor that excludes a spatial understanding. From this starting point, sayings about the Kingdom from the gospel traditions will be considered for what they reveal about the sort of space the Kingdom represents: sacred, bounded (and with a point of entry), particular and universal, and ideal.

Dalman's Dominance and the 'Kingly Rule' Interpretation

One of the basic insights of the 'spatial turn' in various academic disciplines from geography to cultural studies, is that scholarship has long focussed on issues centred on time and history, and the moment has come for greater attention to spaces and their meanings, and, as Doreen Massey puts it, 'to awaken space from the long sleep engendered by the inattention of the past' (2005: 13). As we turn our attention to the Kingdom of God, it is clear that there is no heyday, or golden period, in which space has been a significant interpretive factor in modern scholarship dealing with New Testament origins and in the

preaching of Jesus.¹ Part of this is to do with the emphasis in Kingdom studies on questions of time and the eschatological significance of the Kingdom. Johnannes Weiss' *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God* (1892) and Albert Schweitzer's *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God* (1901), were hugely influential in shaping questions which would concern many interpreters after them (Willis 1987). The key issues centred on the 'when' and not the 'where' of God's rule.² Although these temporal emphases are clearly important to why spatial interpretations of the Kingdom have failed to thrive, it can be argued that it is actually Gustaf Dalman, a contemporary of Weiss and Schweitzer, who did more damage to the possibility of considering the Kingdom as a significant religious space when he excluded the spatial from the very translation and terminology of the Kingdom.

¹ Perhaps there is greater scope for a spatial, or at least more 'mappable', appreciation within later interpretations of the Kingdom of God (Scafi 2006: esp. 84-113). See also Ian Stockton's article considering Kingdom in relation to the transformation of (physical) landscape at Wearmouth-Jarrow (Stockton 2010: 3-11) and Vorster's discussion of the Kingdom in a contemporary South African context (2015).

² Illustrating this point, Chrupcala's bibliography of research on the Kingdom of God designates six entries to the category 'Space (local sphere)', in comparison with the forty-seven entries included under the heading 'Time' (Chrupcala 2007). Recently, this emphasis on time in Kingdom research has been highlighted and critiqued by Halvor Moxnes, who stands as a notable exception to mainstream scholarship in his consideration of the Kingdom from a spatial-critical perspective, as 'a vision of how a real place might be imagined differently' (Moxnes 2003: 109). If Moxnes' work constitutes a beginning point, there remains a large amount of ground to make up before spatial interests could be said to rival those focused on time.

Dalman's now classic argument, found in his 1898 (1902 English translation) work, *Die Worte Jesu*, concerns the meaning of the sovereignty of God in Hebrew and Aramaic sources. Although much of what he had to say was actually centred around Matthew's Kingdom of Heaven terminology³), there is one particular statement by Dalman that has stood out for subsequent scholars (here in the English translation):

No doubt can be entertained that *both* in the Old Testament *and* in Jewish literature מלכות [*malkût*], when applied to God, *means always* the 'kingly rule,' never the 'kingdom,' as if it were meant to suggest the territory governed by him. (Dalman 1902: 94; emphasis added)

Although Dalman leaves little room for other meanings of מלכות, he does suggest that a 'trace' could have remained (for מלכותא דשמיא) of the thought that 'the dwelling-place of God was being named instead of Him who was there enthroned' (Dalman 1902: 92).

Nonetheless, it is not the trace of a spatial thought, but the particular sentence quoted above which has proved influential, much more so than any other aspects or nuances of his argument. The statement has a solid certainty in its assertion regarding the meaning of the Kingdom which has largely been accepted in scholarship.⁴ Illustrating this, Norman Perrin

³ That is, for Dalman, Mark and Luke 'out of regard to heathen readers, avoided the specifically Jewish expression' (Dalman 1902: 93) found in Matthew. Matthew preferred the 'popular' Kingdom of heaven, also avoiding the divine name. Maurice Casey has recently deemed this line of argument 'regrettably influential' (Casey 2010: 213).

⁴ See O'Neill (1993) and Brown (2001) on the influence of Dalman's statement. Citation is ubiquitous and it would be a challenge to discover work on the Kingdom since Dalman which *does not* make reference to this particular statement.

referred to Dalman's work as 'epoch-making', stating that 'there can be no going back from his conclusions in regard to the meaning of this phrase' (Perrin 1963: 24).⁵ And J. C. O'Neill went so far as to identify these particular words of Dalman as constituting, '[i]n New Testament studies, perhaps the most influential sentence ever written' (O'Neill 1993: 130). There is no doubt that this one sentence penned by Dalman has had a significant impact.

In a recent example, Joel Marcus' commentary and translation of the Gospel of Mark upholds Dalman's position, preferring 'dominion of God' to 'kingdom of God' in the translation of ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ.⁶ Marcus highlights a point that Sverre Aalen had earlier commented on: the fact that, despite the scholarly acceptance of 'reign, or rule of God', major English (as well as German and Norwegian) translations have not changed their preference for 'kingdom' to 'reign' or 'rule' (Aalen 1962: 215). Marcus suggestively lays some of the blame for the common use of 'kingdom' with the King James translation:

hē basileia tou theou, a phrase that the King James translators rendered as 'the kingdom of God' but that most modern scholars have recognized is not so much the *place* where God rules as the *fact* that he rules or the *power* by which he manifests his sovereignty; hence the translation 'dominion of God.' (Marcus 2000: 172)

Though the history of translation in the English language, and the influence of particular versions in translation of ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ would be interesting to explore, this still does

⁵ Like so many others, Perrin quotes from the statement of Dalman referenced above. See also Perrin 1976.

⁶ See Marcus 2000 and Marcus 2009. See also his earlier article in *JBL* (1988), wherein he explicitly defends Dalman's understanding (esp. 663-75).

not explain the necessity of a strong insistence on removing any spatial aspect to the terminology, which seems to be essential to the Dalman interpretation which asserts *never* 'kingdom' and *never* territory. And yet, if we look to lexical tools, clearly a more spatial definition is part of the range of meanings which can be identified. The translation 'kingdom' is not incorrect or a poor translation of the Greek term. However, it is interesting that lexicons generally prefer 'reign' as the primary definition of βασιλεία, with 'kingdom' normally appearing as a second listing. This may also reflect the influence of Dalman, especially where interpreters are clearly being directed toward one definition over another. Significantly, Louw-Nida (1989) goes so far as to tell us in the entry for βασιλεία that

[I]t is generally a serious mistake to translate the phrase ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ 'the kingdom of God' as referring to a particular area in which God rules. The meaning of this phrase in the NT involves not a particular place or special period of time but the fact of ruling.⁷

How could any scholar or interpreter prefer a spatial understanding of βασιλεία having encountered such a strict admonition? Yet, it is important to be reminded, in the face of such strong definitional insistence bearing Dalman's influence, that spatial meanings *are* still possible and not essentially wrong or mistaken. Rick Brown is correct in his evaluation that Dalman's influence has been monumental, and that this type of insistence on the rule definition has (at the very least) inhibited translators and interpreters from appreciating the 'breadth of meaning' of kingdom terminology (Brown 2001, 18). We can agree with Brown

⁷ The reference is strikingly similar to Marcus' cited above in its use of the language of 'not place' and the 'fact of ruling'. See also Vorster's critical discussion of the authority of Louw-Nida (1991).

that ‘translators might do well...to widen their understanding of this complex concept’ (Brown 2001, 3) and this includes more spatial meanings which have gone unexplored.

Dalman’s definition severely limits possibilities. Whilst ‘dominion’ or ‘reign’ does not necessarily constitute a poor translation of βασιλεία (and also *malkût/malkûtā*), nothing inherent in βασιλεία tells us that we should decide *against* a spatial aspect.⁸ Taking this notion as an important starting point – the recognition that it is not incorrect in relation to the terminology itself to ask what the Kingdom might mean in spatial terms of reference – we gain the permission we need to think beyond Dalman’s kingly rule definition and open up the possibilities for meaning. Whatever the Kingdom is, even as ‘dominion’ it should tell us something about God, his relationship to humans and the correct ordering of the world, which are, after all, spatial concerns relating to sacred geography (Alexander 1992; see also Alexander 1982). Biblical authors and editors from Genesis and creation through the various canons were certainly occupied with order and the relationship between God and people in (sacred) space (Kunin 1998). The moment has arrived for a fresh evaluation of the spatial potential of the Kingdom of God. T

What Sort of Space? 1. Sacred

If questioning Dalman gives us the freedom to move away from the beginning premise that reference to the Kingdom of God always implies the kingly rule of God, this does not tell us

⁸ We could also add, in line with some of O’Neill’s and Aalen’s observations (O’Neill 1993; Aalen 1962), that ‘dominion’ itself suggests an *area* of dominion, and ‘reign’ without the spatial connotation of the noun can be achieved using the verb βασιλεύω (*mālak*).

what it might mean to appreciate the Kingdom spatially. What kind of space are we speaking about?

We begin with the idea of the Kingdom as sacred space. This departs from existing scholarship in that 'sacred space' has not been employed as a category for understanding the Kingdom, as we can see from survey material such as Duling (1992) and Theissen and Merz (1998, 240-280). Even in scholarship that considers the Kingdom as more spatial in contrast to Dalman's interpretation (Aalen 1962) and as imaginary space of a household (Moxnes 2003), the category of sacred space is not considered. Neither is the 'Kingdom' a common example in surveys of sacred space from a comparative religions perspective, such as we might find in Brereton (1987) and Davies (2000a). Here, more common is reference to 'heaven' as a type of sacred space that symbolically represents the 'realm of the gods' and an 'exemplar of divine order' (Brereton 1987, 533; see also Harris 1996). Davies points out the difficulties for understanding more symbolic spaces without a concrete existence:

It is very easy to discuss sacred places that can be located on ancient or modern maps, but it is much more difficult to talk about those 'places' that are often described as though they exist in a physical way but which belong essentially to the world of faith and certainly cannot be visited today. The Garden of Eden and Heaven might be two obvious examples.

(Davies 2000b, page 33)

If the Garden of Eden and Heaven can be considered sacred spaces in the way Davies suggests, then certainly the Kingdom of God can be considered another example of this type of space. It is spoken about as if it exists in a physical way – it is possible to be 'in' it, and to 'enter' it (see references and discussion below) – but it requires belief in the good news (Mark 1:15), not pilgrimage to any specific site.

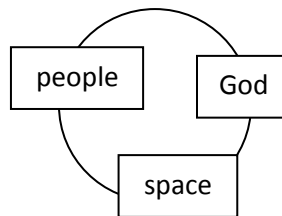
Not being daunted by the difficulty of the task, it is possible to assess the significance of the Kingdom as sacred space, drawing on evidence from the gospels. It is

within the gospel traditions that the phrase ‘the Kingdom of God’ primarily arises, not being prominent either in Jewish literature prior to the writing of gospels, or with similar frequency to the gospels in the rest of the New Testament (Robinson 2011).⁹ Prior to considering specific sayings, it is helpful to begin with a more general point, which is that the Kingdom may have more in common with the more ‘mappable’ sacred spaces in wider biblical tradition than first imagined. Take, for instance, a highly important sacred space in biblical perspective – the land. More than merely space that can be located ‘on the ground’, land as a cognitive category defines the largest area of sacred space in distinction from the nations.¹⁰ The absolute distinction between Israel and the nations is arguably more significant than the ‘mappable’ placement of the boundaries themselves which in any case shift from era to era, or text to text (Habel 1995, 134-148). The establishment of the land as

⁹ James Robinson speaks of the ‘rise and fall of ‘the kingdom of God’ by which he means that the phrase ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ is not prominent in any way in Jewish literature of around the time of Jesus. It is not a common everyday sort of metaphor that all Jews from the ruling elite to Jesus’ ‘illiterate, Aramaic-speaking audiences’ would have known about and had a clear conception of. Rather, it arises primarily in gospel traditions, and then becomes less prominent once again. For emphasis he points out that the Septuagint ‘never ever makes use of the metaphor ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ’ (3203), and there are only a handful of other references in Philo, the *Sentences of Sextus*, and the so-called Pseudepigrapha. ‘Where is the metaphor that is supposed to be so common that every peasant knows what it means?’ (3204) The answer? It ‘barely existed’.

¹⁰ Equal to the ‘camp’ in relation to ‘outside the camp’ in the dynamic biblical model. So, ‘opposition between Israel and the nations, and the camp and the world reflects the same underlying structural pattern. In each case the categories are exclusive and unbridgeable. Each category is so defined that it excludes the other’ (Kunin 1998, 14). See the wider discussion in Kunin, pp. 11-45.

gift by God to Abraham's descendants (Gen 12.7; 15.18) sets out a clear relationship between God-people-space, or more specifically God-people-land. Whereas further spaces distinguished inside the land (the tabernacle, temple, holy of holies) relate to particular roles and hierarchy, the land itself includes all the people as a whole.¹¹ The relationship between God-people-space is not only relevant for understanding biblical spaces, but also more broadly speaking sacred spaces that relate to the widest category of a religiously defined people or group as a whole. The relationship can be depicted in a non-linear way as to show that each aspect is connected to both of the others:¹²



The establishment of a relationship between a whole people and their God in space can be achieved in any number of ways, and part of the fascination of sacred spaces is their great diversity in terms of the connections that may be established (Brereton 1987). There is no set of agreed rules, or criteria that must be met, for defining space in relationship to the divine. Whereas in Genesis, God speaks directly to Abraham to establish the connection to

¹¹ In relation to a royal ideology, see Habel 1995: 'The people, as a whole, have a right to the land as their entitlement from God.' (32).

¹² Inge similarly depicts this as a triangular relationship as he sets out his understanding of a 'relational view of space' (2003, 46; see also 46-51). We have attempted here to avoid in some way an implied hierarchy of the 'top' of the pyramid.

the land, in the gospels it is Jesus and not God who announces the Kingdom.¹³ God does speak directly to identify Jesus as his son (Mark 1.11, 9.7 and parallels), but not to announce the Kingdom or speak of it as a gift. Nevertheless, the very terminology itself reveals a connection to the divine. At the risk of stating the obvious, it is worth emphasising the '*tou theou*' aspect of the Kingdom, and how the phrase itself establishes a grammatical relationship to the divine. The Kingdom belongs to God, and Matthew emphasises the heavenly realm in his distinctive use of the terminology of heaven (Foster 2002). If 'a sacred space comes into being when it is interpreted as such' (Brereton 1987, 526), the very terminology of the Kingdom, spoken of by Jesus (as God's son), establishes a connection to the divine realm. This is not a secular, but a sacred Kingdom, which is also connected to a group of people who have been 'given the mystery of the Kingdom' (Mark 4:11//Matt 13:11//Luke 8:10) and to whom the Kingdom 'belongs' (Mark 10:14//Matt 19:14//Luke 18:16). This group of people are those who 'enter' (Mark 10:23-5//Matt 19:23-4//Luke 18:24-5), 'receive the word' (Mark 4:16), 'repent and believe' (Mark 1:15//Matt 4:17).

In fact, the connections are so close between the Kingdom and the group that the lines blur between them in some regards. Although Robinson notes other aspects of meaning for the Kingdom, he identifies the Kingdom as the type of terminology that refers to a community and their boundaries. The Christian group that was more than the 'disciples'

¹³ For example, in Mark's gospel, every statement about the Kingdom is made by Jesus himself, apart from the final reference, after the death of Jesus, when Mark as narrator mentions that Joseph of Arimathea was 'awaiting the Kingdom of God' (15.43). See Malbon 2003. Thereby as Jesus is the only character to speak of the 'Kingdom of God', it (along with the 'Son of Man') 'depict[s] the Markan Jesus' distinctive point of view.' (374)

‘apostles’ or the ‘twelve’ needed a name for its community, and the Kingdom suited this need. It can be seen alongside other terms in early Christianity like ἐκκλησία, Χριστιανοί, οἱ πτωχοί, and Paul’s locative sense of being ‘in Christ’ (3215-6). Robinson’s perspective confirms the identification of the Kingdom with the largest level of belonging to the group. The presence of a ‘plethora of designations for the Christian community’ (3216) highlights the strong need for self-definition at this level. And yet the Kingdom has its own specific associations (explored further below) which give a particular spatial dimension to the group, allowing for the establishment of sacred order and connections between God-people-space. In a similar way to the relationship of God-people-land, the Kingdom relates to the community in the largest sense and connects them to God. In comparative terms, something like the idea of *ummah* or community in Islam could be considered spatial terminology that sets out the entire group, the religious community belonging to God.¹⁴

Finally, if the Kingdom is made sacred by association with the divine, it is worth asking what can be said about God’s role in the God-people-space relationship. Although the idea of God as King who reigns clearly occurs in biblical texts (Psalms 47, 93, 96-99; Jer. 10.10), and the idea of God as King and Father could even occur together in ancient religious context (Moxnes 2003, 115, and fn on p. 185), the gospels are notable for the absence of

¹⁴ See Rehmani (2010), who notes that the ‘concept of Ummah based on religion’ for its difference from ‘tribal blood kinship relations’. Also: ‘The concept of Ummah as a religious community developed a sense of strong identity that distinguished the Arabs as believers and non-believers....This concept also gave the Muslims a sense of a strong community distinct from the already existing Christian and Jew communities.’ (12). See also Knott, who draws attention to the global, or worldwide aspect of appeal in the notion of *ummah* (Knott 2005, 116).

description of God as king.¹⁵ Aalen takes note of ‘a striking fact’: ‘the gospels never use either the word ‘king’ (*basileus*) or the verb reign (*basileuien*) in connexion with the kingdom of God’ (218). Instead of God as King, we find the identification of God as a Father (e.g. Mark 11.25, Matt 6.31-2//Lk 12.29-31, Matt 6.8) or a Father in Heaven, as in Matthew’s designation (e.g. Matt 6.9, 7.9-11, 11.25). The fatherhood of God fits with the situation of fictive kinship among the community associated with the Kingdom of God (Mark 3.33-35, Matt 12.49) and suggests the Kingdom as a household space where those who have been dislocated from their places of identity and home in society find new places and family relationships (Moxnes 2003, 68-70, 108). Followers of Jesus are taught to address God as a Father who provides daily bread, in a prayer that also looks for the coming of God’s Kingdom (Matthew 6.9-11). Jesus himself addresses God as father in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14.36) ‘at the major crisis of his life’ (Casey 2010, 211).

As already noted, Jesus rather than God announces the Kingdom, so could it be that Jesus is identified as King? Unfortunately, the gospels are ambiguous in terms of affirming the identity of Jesus as King or the Kingdom as Davidic (e.g. 2 Sam 7.13-14). In the trial and passion of Jesus, there is considerable focus on whether he claims to be a ‘king of Israel’ or ‘king of the Jews’ (Mark 15.2-32; Matt 27.11-42; Luke 23.2-38), but Jesus’ ‘you say so’ (Mark 15.2//Matt 27.11//Luke 23.3) response is hardly strong affirmation of the identification.¹⁶ In

¹⁵ See especially Moxnes 115-6 and Aalen 217-218, who notes two Matthean parables as exceptions – the parable of the unmerciful servant in Matt 18 and the parable of the marriage feast in chapter 22. The Lukan version of the parable of the marriage feast does not include the element of a king (Aalen 1962, 217).

¹⁶ See Beavis’ summary of the evidence in Beavis 2006, 96.

the 'triumphal entry' those around Jesus in Mark hail, 'Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!' (Mark 11.10), but the specific phrase ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ is not used, and the crowds later call for the death of Jesus (Mark 15.6-15) so the significance of their actions cannot be affirmed in a straightforward manner in this scene.¹⁷ When we combine the observation that God is not described as a king with doubt over Jesus' identification as king, we end up with a Kingdom with no clear king. This is not necessarily problematic when we think in a more spatial way. The idea of God as a Father with a Kingdom is not a logical contradiction in terms. If we compare other spatial ways of speaking, to describe a body as a 'temple of the holy spirit' (1 Cor 6.19) does not necessitate the understanding of God as a divine high priest. Taking a description and imagining God as the highest ranking category of that spatial hierarchy does not appear to be the way that religious spatial language works, at least not as anything like a strict rule. Indeed speaking about a 'house of God' does not necessitate an understanding of God as a Father, as can be seen in the identification of the temple as the 'house of God'. The images may be mixed, but the understanding of God as Father and the Kingdom of God as a space do not create a necessary conflict. They can coincide with each other without bringing in the image of a king, particularly where we do not see the terms for king and ruling connected to the Kingdom of God. If God (or Jesus) is

¹⁷ Hooker notes the ambiguity as to whether this 'those who went before and those who followed' is the same group as the crowd that later demand the death of Jesus, but points out that the triumphal entry is not referenced in the trial of Jesus, so it is more likely that this is not meant to be those travelling with Jesus (Hooker 1991, 256). Even if it is those travelling with Jesus who identify him in this way, it still falls short of a clearly positive affirmation by Jesus in relation to the Kingdom; he announces the 'Kingdom of God' not the 'Kingdom of our ancestor David'.

to be understood in the role of a king, then this must be demonstrated separately. The specific terminology of the Kingdom of God *itself* does not do this work for us.¹⁸

The terminology of the Kingdom of God can be understood as setting out sacred space, a relationship between God-people-place, which begins to emerge as a community space, defining the largest level of human relationship to God as Father. There are further characteristics of this sacred space which are worth exploring, namely the strong sense of boundary and 'entering' that emerges in the tradition.

What Sort of Space? 2. Bounded

The Kingdom of God is bounded space. Although it should be noted that it is not a necessary aspect of group identity to include the idea of a boundary, sayings about the Kingdom clearly employ boundary imagery.¹⁹ There is a definite 'inside' to the Kingdom (Mark 4.11;

¹⁸ Aalen makes a somewhat similar point, though he affirms the kingship of Jesus overall, saying that 'the kingship of Christ does not conflict with the idea that the kingdom of God is essential a community or an area. Nothing prevents a country from having a king, but that does not mean that the concept 'country' implies the idea' (217). We could agree with the statement in some regards, that nothing in the terminology either necessitates or prevents there being a king, yet there remains a question over whether the identification of Jesus as king can be affirmed by the evidence.

¹⁹ The language of boundaries can be overused in discussions of group identity, and we take seriously Frederik Barth's point that it is inappropriate to employ the concept of boundaries where 'no such boundary imagery has been involved in the processes that generate these groups and identities' (Barth 2000, 25). The terminology certainly has the potential for overuse by analysts. In

Matt 18.1-4; Mark 14.25//Matt 26.29//Luke 22.16; Matt 5.19; Matt 8.11-12//Luke 13.28-19; Matt 11.11//Luke 7.28; Matt 13.43; Luke 14.15), as well as the possibility of entering it (Mark 9.47; Mark 10.15//Matt 18.3//Luke 18.17; Mark 10.23-25//Matt 19.23-24//Luke 18.24-25; Matt 5.20, 7.21, 21.31, 23.13; Luke 16.16, 23.42).²⁰ The fact that we are still talking about a sacred space that, as Davies put it, is only spoken about 'as though' it exists physically should not deter us. It is well worth being reminded that boundaries are more than just physical, and indeed do not have to be physical at all. As in Frederik Barth's discussion, boundaries can be defined at different levels, and not all of them may be present in any given situation:

- 1) Literally boundaries that divide on the ground
 - 2) More abstractly, they set limits that mark social groups off from each other
 - 3) Provide a template for that which separates distinct categories of the mind
- (Barth 2000, 17)

The third category might include something like the absolute distinctions between pure and impure in the God-people-land relationship, and for the Kingdom perhaps the dualistic aspect of the gospels that relates to the power of God and Satan and their two kingdoms/houses (Mark 3.24-26//Matt 12.25-29//Luke 11.21-23). With regard to the second aspect of boundaries, the statements about 'being in' the Kingdom clearly – if abstractly – can be shown to set out the limits of the group and focus attention on the

the case of the Kingdom of God in the gospels, however, it does appear to be the case that 'boundary imagery' is employed and clearly present in the tradition. The idea of there being a point of entry and an 'inside' and 'outside' of the Kingdom is integral to the way that the Kingdom/community is described.

²⁰ See Marcus' categories and references for the kingdom sayings (Marcus 1988, 663).

community and the 'who' of belonging. They give those who are 'in' the Kingdom 'authentic markers of their difference from other people ['them', 'others', 'those outside' – Mark 3 and pars]' (Cohen 2000, 5). Perhaps some of the reason that the Kingdom appears obscure and badly explained to scholars and interpreters (Weiss 1971(1892): 102; Schweitzer 1954(1906): 90-101; Casey 2009: 212) is that the gospels only seem to recognise the need to lay down the boundary. The 'implicit and tacit knowledge of it' does not appear to require an explanation, but is 'shared among those bounded by it' (Cohen 2000, 5). That is, if one perceives and understands the parables, they 'get' the mystery (Mark 4:11//Matt 13.11//Luke 8:10). If they are 'like a little child' (Mark 10.15//Matt 18.3//Luke 18.17), they will know why that is necessary for being part of the Kingdom, and so on. The boundary itself is cognitive. It 'lays down some premises, but it does not determine all the social forms that eventuate' (Barth 2000, 30). That is, other 'social and material processes' are set in motion, but 'not by cognitive fiat as the drawing of the boundary was' (Barth 2000, 30). In spatial perspective, we could say that the eventual building of purpose-built meeting structures like Dura Europas, with internal spaces designed for ritual practice distinguishing 'our type of worship' from other surrounding practices, is possible for a group who have the cognitive capacity to understand themselves as distinguished from others. The later structure is afforded by the (cognitive) drawing of the boundary at a more formative stage.

If we take a closer look at the notion of boundary as described in relation to the Kingdom in the gospels, a good place to start is the clear distinction between inclusion and location 'outside' which is implied by Mark's statement following the parable of the sower: 'And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables' (Mar 4:11 NRS). Matthew makes this a case of

‘you’ and ‘them’ (Matt 13.11), and Luke opposes ‘you’ and ‘others’ (Luke 8.10). In each case, the ‘you’ is the group ‘inside’ in relation to the Kingdom; they are the ones who belong and have been given the mystery. The association of ‘mystery’ with ‘Kingdom’ recalls Daniel (Dan 2.27-8), but here the mystery is part of what defines the group and the boundary between insiders and outsiders. It is not associated with God’s revelation of the meaning of dreams and visions of successive empires, but with understanding the way that the Kingdom grows – organically like plants from seeds, spread as the word is spread (Mark 4.26).

Does this notion of organic growth undermine the ‘normal’ means of growth when we are speaking of an ethnic group – by the birth of physical children? This question relates to issues raised by Michaels – identified as ‘seldom discussed’ (1987, 114) – over what can be said about the ethnicity of the Kingdom. In the relationship God-people-land, kinship with Abraham was part of the largest level of belonging. And yet, this did not preclude the possibility of proselytism, of including Gentiles in an ethnically defined Jewish group (McKnight 1991). Texts like *Joseph and Aseneth*, as well as evidence in the writings of Josephus and Tacitus and Roman inscriptions relating to proselytes demonstrate the possibility of converts and sympathisers being attracted to Judaism, and effectively changing their ethnicity (Barclay 1996). And yet, whatever the exact numbers of converts, ‘growing’ in itself does not appear to be a particularly desired aspiration (Barclay 1996, 408-10). In comparison, the description and terms (hundredfold) that appear in the growth parables in the gospels sound ambitious. The fictive family relationships described in the gospels (e.g. Mark 3.33-35) – as well as the evidence for proselytism in Judaism – pose a certain challenge to the idea that the group boundary aligns absolutely with ethnic belonging. Riches notes a comparative example in Jubilees 15.25-32 where the ‘sons of the covenant’ could be

drawn from all people, and not all of the sons of Abraham were included, so that the community described were not limited to, or coterminous with, the descendants of Abraham (Riches 2000, 27). Although proselytes would necessarily be Gentiles, with fictive family members, such as we find in the gospels, the parameters could still be within one ethnic group. That is, the 'new' family could be made up of people from the same ethnic group that the 'physical' family also belong to. Yet there remains a challenge at the conceptual level to the very premise, or mode of ethnic belonging to the group, e.g. being born into it. This opens the door up to the expanded idea of not just a fictive family group, but a fictive ethnic group, which has the potential to include two (or more) ethnicities, e.g. Jews and Gentiles. As the fictive family and its associated notions of kinship are set out in the gospel traditions, they allow not only for connections to others who not related by birth, but also for the potential of those who are properly 'inside' when measured by a kinship-defined relationship between God-people to be found 'outside' the God-people-space relationship of the Kingdom, as in the harsh saying of Matthew:

I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Mat 8:11-12 NRS; cf Luke 13.28-9)

Here, the kinship notion of 'heirs' and spatial proximity to Abraham and his descendants come out of alignment – or perhaps become confused – in relation to the boundary of the Kingdom. Relating this back to the parabolic understanding of the Kingdom as something that grows mysteriously – one knows not how (Mark 4.27) – we see a particular way of describing the boundary and the addition of members to the group. As the word is spread, brothers and sisters and mothers are added by bonds of fictive kinship. The metaphors may

be mixed, but this fictive family grows like a garden or crops (Mark 4:2-34 and parallels). The largest level of belonging is not defined in reference to physical birth.

Other sayings raise similar questions about the 'who' of belonging and also indicate the presence of a boundary. The greatest and least statements (Matt 5:19, 18:1-4; Matt 11.11//Luke 7:28) are all spoken of as relative to being 'in' the Kingdom, where the humble nature of the child and obedience to the commandments are valued. Although Jesus himself speaks of being 'in' the Kingdom (Mark 14.25 and parallels), the majority of statements that use the boundary language of inside and outside are spoken by Jesus to others and have something to say about what it means to belong to the community. If we put this in terms of the relationship between God-people-space, the boundary aspect of the Kingdom seems most concerned with the identity and constitution of the group. The group of sayings that speak of belonging to or possessing/inheriting the Kingdom²¹ should also be included as evidence for this sense of being 'in' and belonging to the larger group, as for example Jesus' statement about the example of children: 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.' (Mark 10.14 and parallels). The line between 'in' and 'outside' of the group is being drawn in relation to the qualities of children and to listening, perceiving and understanding the parables, rather than necessarily adhering to the expected means of group membership according to a kinship definition. Put another way, if one only needed to be born into the appropriate physical family to belong,

²¹ See Marcus 1988; he includes the following among 'those [sayings] which speak of the kingdom as a possession' or more expansively 'something possessed, received, sought, given, or inherited': Mark 10.14-15 (and parallels); Matthew 5.3//Luke 6.20; Matt 5.10; Matt 6.33//Luke 12.31; Matt 21.43, 25.34; Luke 12.32; 22.29 and possibly Mark 4.11//Matt 13.11//Luke 8.10 (Marcus 1988, 663).

neither riches or poverty would make any difference to being able to 'enter' (Mark 10.23-5//Matt 19.23-24//Luke 22.24-25), which brings us to the next set of sayings.

Closely tied to the language of being 'in' the Kingdom is the language of entry into the Kingdom. The idea that there is a specific point of entry to the Kingdom reinforces the existence of the boundary and gives a strongly spatial configuration to the Kingdom. Like the statements about being 'in' the Kingdom, the entry statements are primarily spoken by Jesus and relate to the identity of the 'who' that enters. We can see this in these examples:

And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, (Mark 9.47)

Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it (Mar 10:14-15 NRS)

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." (Mar 10:23-25 NRS)

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Mat 5:19-20 NRS)

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven (Mat 7:21 NRS)

As with the boundary statements, those who have entered know the shared sense of belonging in the relationship God-people-Kingdom. They understand why it is better to be maimed physically but 'in', why being like a child is essential, what it means to do the will of the Father and to have greater righteousness than scribes and Pharisees. If one is among the few wealthy to have entered, they understand with great poignancy the reasons why wealth makes entry difficult. Understanding is from the perspective of belonging, and there is in

evidence greater concern with qualities ('as a little child', maimed but not stumbling), status (having wealth) and behaviour (exceeding righteousness, doing the will of the Father), than with 'what' is being entered, whether physical or dynamic.²² The focus is on the 'who' rather than the 'where' of belonging.

Like the boundary, the point of entry is cognitive, and the collection of sayings that speak of entry do not mention specific rites associated with initiation into the group. Baptism is the most natural rite that fulfils this purpose, and we can consider it to be among the 'social and material processes' (Barth 2000) that mark entry into the *ekklesia* and relate to the cognitive establishment of the boundary and point of entry itself. Christiansen, in her study of baptism in the early church, notes how baptism as an entry ritual allowed an individual to 'express a change in social identity' (Christiansen 1997, 13). These types of rites signify 'crossing a boundary, and mark becoming part of a community'; further 'they serve

²² Marcus draws attention to the 'entering' statements concerning the Kingdom as constituting the greatest challenge to Dalman's 'kingly rule' interpretation: 'If the 'entering statements can be shown to imply a dynamic interpretation of the kingdom', then Dalman will be vindicated as the rest of the gospel statements concerning the kingdom will 'fall easily into line' with the 'kingly rule' definition (Marcus 1988, 665). The problem with providing (as Marcus does) biblical and contextual evidence of where 'entering' can be of a physical space (land – Deut 4.1, 6.17-18, 16.20; or the temple gates – Ps 15, 24; also reinterpreted in post-exilic contexts) or more dynamically of 'entering' or sharing in an action (entering into judgment – Ps 143.2; Job 14.3; the might of God – Ps 71.16; the righteousness of God – Ps 69.27; Marcus 1988, 669-670), is that the statements in the gospels about entering do not seem to be concerned with the choice between one or the other. They emphasise instead questions of identity and – once again – the 'who' of the Kingdom in terms of belonging.

as a means to differentiate socially one group from another.’²³ Although the Kingdom sayings regarding entry do not specify the ritual of baptism, they nonetheless establish the cognitive necessity of a point of entry to the Kingdom, a beginning where the boundary to the inside of the community is breached.

Jesus’ way of speaking about the Kingdom in the gospels is highly spatial (if also symbolic and metaphorical); it refers to both a boundary and point of entry, cognitively distinguishing one social group from another. However, we have not yet considered the possibility of a physical referent in relation to the Kingdom; something that more literally divides on the ground (Barth 2000). For even as a ‘term for religious experience’ (Robinson 2011, 3216), the Kingdom as sacred space could conceivably have a connection to the land as the physical entity to which the conceptual community idea applies. After all, other ideal utopian spaces in Jewish tradition do have such a referent. Collins describes the biblical vision of utopia is firmly and ‘concretely embodied in a specific land’ (Collins 2000, 67). Is the Kingdom also embodied in a more concrete way?

What Sort of Space? 3. Particular and/or Universal?

Here, our comparative example of the land as a sacred space that relates to the largest category of belonging becomes a consideration in itself. If the Kingdom is sacred, bounded space which establishes a relationship between God-people-space, it is possible that the Kingdom implies Israel, or the specific relationship God-people-land. Scholars have tended to resist the idea that the Kingdom could have a specific referent. In the Louw-Nida

²³ Christianson 1997, 13; note the similarity to aspect two in Barth’s description of boundaries quoted above.

definition of *basileia* quoted above, the emphasis works against identification with place, or a ‘*particular area*’ or a ‘*particular place*’. For R. T. France, a specific referent would restrict the notion of ‘kingly rule’ too greatly:

in the light of the widespread recognition that βασιλεία is essentially an abstract noun referring to the ‘rule’ or ‘kingship’ of God, the phrase ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ should not be read as a term with a *single specific referent*, whether a time, place, event or situation. (France 2002: 93, emphasis added)²⁴

Whilst some have rejected the particular associations of space at a more general level, Mary Ann Beavis is more direct in her insistence that the Kingdom is ‘not Israel’ in her recent study of the Kingdom, which is carried out in light of utopian traditions in the Greco-Roman world. Dalman’s ‘rule’ definition is also in evidence in her evaluation:

The *lack of any consistent portrayal* of the kingdom in terms of some idealized age in Israel’s past complements the universalistic interpretation of *God’s rule*, and suggests that ‘utopianism’ emphasized the ‘no-place’ (οὐ-τόπος) character of the βασιλεία. For Jesus, although God is the rightful and only king of Israel and of the earth, the kingdom is *not Israel, past, present or future*. (Beavis 2004: 105-6, emphasis added)²⁵

Here, the Kingdom fails to evidence specificity and consistency with regard to earlier utopian models, and so is understood as universal rule of ‘no-place’. With such certainty evident in Beavis’ evaluation, it is striking to note that Walter Brueggemann came to quite different conclusions in his assessment of the relationship between Kingdom and land:

²⁴ See also Hooker 1991: 55.

²⁵ See also the similar arguments in Beavis 2006 and 2007.

The theme of 'kingdom' is crucial for our consideration. It clearly includes among its nuances the idea of historical, political, physical realm, that is land. It may and surely does mean more than that, but it is never so spiritualized that those elemental nuances are denied or overcome. However rich and complex the imagery may be in its various articulations, the coming of Jesus is understood with reference to new land arrangements (Brueggemann 2002,161).

Spatially, these are quite different proposals when we consider a choice between universal 'no place' and 'new land arrangements'. The difficulty is that both can be argued, and the texts do not give us a definitive or logically consistent 'original' to look back to and decide between 'particular' and 'universal'.

On the one hand, Beavis would seem to be correct to identify a lack of ties to the particular space of Israel/land in the Kingdom traditions. She gives as evidence Luke's statement about the kingdom not being 'here or there', as well as the parable of the Kingdom as yeast that spreads to leaven bread, the small mustard seed that grows large, and the treasure in the field to support the idea that the Kingdom is 'somewhat reminiscent' of Josephus' notion of a theocracy (Beavis 2004, 102). Certainly these sayings in the gospels do not make any direct mention of the land, and the spatial notion of a theocracy is an intriguing one. Josephus uses the term 'theocracy' on one occasion in *Against Apion*, and states that the term relates to a Jewish polity that ascribes to God all 'sovereignty and power' (2.165) in comparison with monarchies, oligarchies and republican forms of government (2.164). Though not directly connected to the notion of theocracy, at the end of *Against Apion*, Josephus speaks about the conviction that 'everything and everywhere' (πάντα καὶ πανταχοῦ) is under the observation and order/arrangement of God (2.294). This

statement is where Beavis gains evidence for theocracy as an “invisible kingdom’ dispersed around the world’ (Beavis 2004, 102).

There is an interesting mix here in that Josephus’ does not lose the sense of ‘our’ group, and he speaks of ‘our lawgiver’ in relation to Moses (*Against Apion* 2.286). He also affirms the significance of descent, particularly notable in his description of his own pedigree in *Life* 1 (Mason 2001, xlvi–xlix). On the other hand, by making the connection (one of the ‘beautiful ideas’ of Judaism) between God and ‘everything and everywhere’ (*Against Apion* 2.294) Josephus in this instance comes closer to a true universality by suggesting some level of relationship between God and all humanity (if humans are included in ‘everything’) in all known space. Even in Luke’s saying about the Kingdom, which arguably comes closest to a universal description of space, being neither ‘here’ or ‘there’ is not accompanied by a positive universal statement (i.e. ‘everywhere’), but still comes back to the community sense of being ‘among you’ (Luke 17.21). A truly universal notion of sacred space *would* include God/the divine (however defined) connected equally with all humanity in all creation, so the Kingdom with its clear sense of boundary is not truly universal by this definition. Some of the ideas about sacred space in Hinduism perhaps come close to this type of understanding, where all things and all people have are connected to the sacred, and there is a resistance to defining at all the group boundary at the largest level (Choudhury 2000, 62).

By this standard, the Kingdom falls short of a true universalism as it always seems to come back to ‘our’ group and a particular sense of belonging. The boundary and entrance point already examined do not include all human beings but rather set out a cognitive understanding of those ‘in’ and ‘outside’. Even if the door is open to the idea of a fictive

ethnic group, potentially open to all ethnicities, the insistence on 'entering' keeps a truly universal aspect at bay. Although the spatiality of 'among you' could be anywhere, it is not everywhere. In one sense, there is a universal aspect in that these sayings do not tie the Kingdom to the particularity of any certain place; yet in terms of extent and membership, it is not universal. The inclusion of all humans and the extension to all places remains only at the level of potential and is not definitive for the largest category of belonging within the relationship God-people-Kingdom.

Although we can see something of a – qualified – universal aspect in the evidence considered by Beavis, there is other evidence that could be considered in relation to Brueggemann's suggestion that 'among its [the Kingdom's] nuances' is a connection to the land. It may be that Beavis has too quickly dismissed certain material in looking to dissociate the Kingdom from utopian ideals in Judaism that relate to the land/Israel {xx}. For instance, the group of the twelve as symbolic of Israel as a whole – all the tribes in the land – evokes ideal land spatialities in a similar manner to the sign prophets mentioned by Josephus, of whom we only really know that they drew on hopes related to exodus and entry into the land (*Ant.* 18.85-7; 20.97-99, 167-72, 188; *War* 2.259; 6.285-86; also Acts 21.38). A good case can be made for the twelve as an authentic group, and there is also a ruling element for this group, echoing in some way the role of the twelve phylarchs, which is affirmed by Matthew 19.28//Luke 22.30 and also Mk 10.45, where James and John and the other ten (10+2=12) take their places in a future scenario (Wenell 2007, 116-128). Even at the basic level of the symbolic number of the twelve, something of hopes for ideal life in the land is evoked. Also, the saying in Matthew and Luke about gathering from east and west indicates a gathering to a 'centre'; this relates to Jews (rather than gentiles) being gathered to the

land and Zion in the comparable 'east and west' traditions in Jewish texts (Wenell 2007, 128-135; Allison 1998, 101-102, 179-80). Luke emphasises the anguish of those who expected to be 'in' the group that included Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets' but instead find themselves 'thrown outside' in contrast to 'people' from east and west – all geographies – who are 'in' and eating in the Kingdom where Abraham, *et al* are too (again, most naturally, the land; cf Matt 3.9). The particular is not completely absent here, but at the same time the specific terminology of the land is not explicitly used. It is fair to say that there are at least some nuances to the Kingdom that suggest ideal life in the land, and although land may be a politically dangerous theme to overemphasise in writings of this period (Halpern-Amaru 1994), particular and specific associations are not completely absent. Do the nuances that suggest a connection to the 'world tree' and growing and spreading conflict with this? Can both Beavis and Brueggemann be correct?

To try and gain some perspective on what sorts of spatialities are possible with regard to universal and particular aspects, it is worth noting an observation that Collins makes in relation to the Kingdom motif in Daniel:

First, there is the hymnic use for the sovereignty of God, by which he disposes of all kingdoms. Second, there is the earthly dominion of the Jewish people, which is a kingdom set up by God. Finally, there is the apocalyptic kingdom of the angels, which involves the exaltation of righteous human beings after death. These three ideas are not mutually exclusive. All three are implied in the apocalyptic vision in Dan 7.

(Collins 1987, 84)

This sort of vision suggests a Kingdom that has both universal and particular elements to it, relating spatially to the earth, heavens and land/Israel, also stretching through time into

space beyond death. In spatial terms, there is a mix of ideas, and they can sit side by side without excluding the others. Daniel's does not appear to be a consistent portrayal, any more than what we find in the gospels in relation to the Kingdom, where there does not appear to be a conflict between the more universal and more particular elements; they can both be included without mutual exclusivity. The inclusion of different spatial aspects is not itself controversial – we can have the spreading yeast, growing crops, world tree and tribal ideal all sitting side by side without comment on how this could be possible. What appears to be more controversial to gospel authors are matters like the precise role of the Twelve, and the relevance of kinship at the level largest level of belonging. Beavis' hopes for a consistent portrayal may be misplaced.

What sort of space? 4. Performative Kingdom 'Come Near'

As a final consideration, we turn to sayings where the Kingdom is moving or has 'come near' (Marcus). Such sayings occur in Mark 1.14-15//Matt 4.17 (announcement of the Kingdom), Matt 12.28//Luke 11.20 (Beelzebul controversy), Mark 9.1//Matt 16.28 ('not taste death' 'has come with power'), Mark 15.43//Luke 23.51 (Joseph of Arimathea), and Matt 6.10//Luke 11.2-3 (Lord's prayer), among other references.²⁶ The statements about the Kingdom using various tenses of the verb 'to come' or speaking about the imminent appearance of the Kingdom are of course those that could bring our discussion back to the focus on time. The opening of Mark's gospel makes a distinction between time and spatial proximity in relation to the Kingdom:

The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near

²⁶ For a full listing, see Marcus

Oddly, O'Neill appears to turn this completely on its head when he says, 'The kingdom itself is not near, but the time when the kingdom is to be established is near.' (1993, 134). On the contrary, it would seem that the sense of fulfilled time does not take away from the nearness of the Kingdom. Whether the Kingdom is coming/has come/comes near does not appear to be a distinction that bothers the gospel authors. Not unlike the inclusion of universal and particular elements, it appears that these different tenses can sit side by side without drawing attention as a particularly controversial aspect of the Kingdom. For understanding the Kingdom as a significant sacred space the key observation is that consistency in the present or future tense of the Kingdom is not crucial to its definition in the wider relationship God-people-space.

What *is* important is to be – or belong – on the right side of the boundary, and thereby to position oneself correctly in relation to God and the Kingdom. This is highlighted by material Luke includes as part of the sending out of the seventy (Luke 10.8-12). For those who welcome the message, the news is good; for those who do not welcome it, the nearness of the Kingdom stands as a threat:

Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.'

Here, the message of the Kingdom appears to spread (or not) to entire towns, and this continues with specific examples in 10.13-15; if those who already 'belong' (the seventy) to the Kingdom are welcomed, the 'town and its people' can share in the reassurance of the

nearness of the Kingdom. If they are not welcomed, the proximity of the Kingdom stands as a warning that the town will be like Sodom (Luke 10.12), and so presumably face destruction, though how or when is not clear. The aspect of correctly positioning oneself in relationship to God and the Kingdom is elevated to the level of entire towns, which seem to have the possibility of being 'exalted to heaven' or 'brought down to hades' (10.15). More than some sort of divine postcode lottery, this emphasizes the need to be on the correct side of the boundary in relation to the Kingdom. There is no universal sense of all people and places belonging to God, but a clear need to accept those who bear the message in relation to the Kingdom. The insistence that things could be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for Galilean towns indicates that the traditional associations of sacred space are not a guarantor of safety from judgement. We could compare Matthew's parallel sending out of the twelve, where they are to preach the good news that the Kingdom has come near, and are instructed by Jesus: 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' (Mat 10:5-6 NRS; cf Matt 28.18-20) Though the timing of the kingdom in present/future tense may not be controversial to the gospel authors, there is the suggestion here in the different geographical emphases of Matthew and Luke that some controversy *did* exist over timing, but that this related to the question of whether, in the context of Jesus' ministry prior to his death and resurrection, there had been any hope expressed for Gentile (or Samaritan) towns, or conversely judgement on Jewish towns.

This point brings us to larger questions about spokespersons, controversies, and the expectation of transformed space in the new world coming. Marcus identifies this group of sayings as indicating the motion of the Kingdom. *It* moves, rather than people moving in

relation to *it* (Marcus 1988, 663). This is not an insignificant point, and gives us the sense that the Kingdom as a sacred space is in motion (Wenell 2014). This is not to say that the Kingdom is not capable of relating to ‘real’ life ‘on the ground’ and more concrete boundaries, for Yaneva makes the very interesting suggestion that even a physical building made of bricks and mortar can be a building-in-motion when controversies surround it and groups speak out in relation to it (Yaneva 2010).²⁷ How much more so a space that is spoken of ‘as if’ it exists in a physical way? The relationship that is established between God-people-space is performed as the group defines themselves and their boundary in relation to the sacred. The group – and the Kingdom – need spokespersons to set out the relationship God-people-space, and this is why our choice of the gospel traditions, the place where the specific emphasis on the terminology of the Kingdom of God ‘rises’, proves fortuitous. Here we have different authors – different spokespersons – setting out the scope and meaning of the Kingdom, yet doing so in a way that draws on their own sources/‘originals’ with different emphases, providing interesting evidence in the slight changes of detail and definition (Riches 2000).²⁸

Sociologist and philosopher Bruno Latour describes the activity of spokespersons in relation to groups and notes how they feed off controversies and take on a performative definition. That is to say, groups do not exist in the ostensive way as we could describe ‘mugs and cats and chairs that can be pointed at by the index finger’ (cf. ‘there they are’, or ‘here they are’, cf Luke 17.21), but rather they are ‘made by the various ways and manners

²⁷ Yaneva speaks of the Whitney museum in New York as a ‘building-in-motion’ that actively gathers controversies and reactions to various proposed extension plans.

²⁸ See, e.g. Foster 2002; Roose 2004.

in which they are said to exist' (Latour 2005: 34). The Kingdom, in this mode of thought, *is* what a particular spokesperson (Mark, Matthew, Luke, Thomas) says it is in an ongoing performance of settling controversies by setting ideas down in narrative. Each narrative settles the controversies slightly differently, demonstrating that there 'exist endless ways of rendering the group definition a finite and sure thing' (Latour 2005: 33), of deciding the shape and content of ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ. We begin to see how a performative definition is helpful to understanding the Kingdom as a significant space. Each author settles the controversies they see in relation to the Kingdom in slightly different ways with different implications for the relationship God-people-space. In spatial terms, rather than decoding meanings of the Kingdom from the 'context' around them (Wenell 2014), each gospel author in writing creates a new world:

In other words, when we write or speak, we are not decoding the world, we are creating worlds; or again, we are not just dealing in interpretations of representations, but also equally presentations for thinking thought and being anew. (Dewsbury 2010: 158)²⁹

A performative Kingdom in this mode of thought is something that is more than its representation, and that creates a new world for a group of people in relationship to God at the largest level of belonging. The cognitive work being done in the writing of these texts makes possible other social and material processes that may (or may not) follow on.

²⁹ Contra Stewart (2010), who suggests that 'the author is a product of that [society's] space. The author passes along those social codes that are embedded in space' (57).

Although the sayings about the Kingdom coming near give a sense of expectation and immediacy to the experience of the Kingdom, they do not give a detailed picture of what life in the Kingdom is like when it ‘comes with power’. Perhaps this takes us closer to the genius – or at least durability – of the Kingdom as a spatial resource. Rather than a cause for scholarly lament, its ‘lack of explanation’ may be the key to its success. This is the time, the moment, when things are happening in relation to the new world. For ancient authors to have given this sacred space urgency and proximity is a greater gift than if they had clearly set out a vision for detailed improvements to Galilean society. In the connection to God as father and the forming of fictive kinship relationships, in establishing boundaries and a point of entry, in the inclusion of aspects of universality and particularity, and in the hope of the new world coming, the Kingdom has all it needs to keep moving and to keep being performed.

Concluding Reflections: ‘Originals’, Reception, Performative Space

Thinking of the Kingdom as performative sacred space highlights the fact that we are dealing with movement and controversies all the way down to ‘the original’ Kingdom, and all the way back up again to our own potential for interpretation as spokespersons for the Kingdom. Even the ‘texts themselves’ are part of this process of constant motion and controversy (Beal 2011, 363-364). In the gospel traditions we have discussed, the Kingdom of God establishes a cognitive understanding of ‘our’ group belonging to God. This is not an outsiders’ perspective. Any given gospel author ‘gets’ it as much as the others they write about who are counted as ‘in’.

For those who may be considered spokespersons from a believing point of view today, not all of the performances of the Kingdom, including all of the scholarly (or ‘original’) emphases, may be meaningful. In a recent discussion, Rowan Williams touches on the interpretation of the Kingdom in such a way that it is fairly clear that he does not consider a Dalman-like ‘kingly rule’ interpretation a convincing ideology for many in the present moment. He suggests that rather than being ‘bossed around by a detached sovereign will’ (Williams 2012: 176), Christians today might prefer to re-envision notions of creation and responses to the physical challenges of ecological justice for humans and non-humans by changing the very myths that orient and order life, creating an ‘urgent need’ ‘to see something new’ (Williams 2012: 176).³⁰ In interpretations like this, we begin to see the extent and value of understanding the Kingdom of God as a significant sacred space within the broader study of religion. As a spatial resource, the Kingdom continues to have potential for new meanings, for drawing in controversies and new understandings of order and space, for reconsideration of the connections and character of any or all of the different aspects of the relationship God-people-Kingdom. It helps us to turn our attention to the value for the study of religion of sacred spaces that exist ‘as if’ in a physical way, and the way that religious spokespersons draw on and create cognitive resources – some of them spatial – to formulate and speak for ‘their’ group. It is high time that the Kingdom of God takes its rightful place as a sacred space of considerable significance.

³⁰ I am grateful to John Riches for directing me to this discussion in Williams’ work and its potential relevance to the Kingdom in connection to lived life and change to deeply held beliefs.

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